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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to analyze the role of the elementary school guidance counselor and explore counselors', teachers', and principals' expectations of this role. Involved were 35 schools where the counselor, principal and two randomly selected teachers responded to a Role Expectation Questionnaire and individual interviews. The findings include areas of agreement and disagreement in regard to the counselor's role. A short review of the literature is given. Several implications for personnel in the field are presented. The elementary school principal must realize that conflicting opinions regarding the functions of the counselor exist and that an examination of the principal's expectation of the guidance program, an explanation of the counselor's role to the staff and the use of a role expectation questionnaire to evaluate the existing guidance program are helpful. The suggestions for the elementary school counselor are the elimination of: conflicting expectations of their functions, analysis of specific functions, review of a role expectation questionnaire and discussion of the questionnaire and the setting up of workshops in sensitivity training for counselors. Also indicated is the need on the part of the elementary school teacher to understand and accept the functions of the counselor. (Author/MC)

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# AN ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GUIDANCE COUNSELOR

JUNE 1969

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The University of the State of New York
THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Bureau of Guidance
Albany, New York 12224

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## FOREWORD

In response to many questions concerning the role and duties of the counselor in the elementary school, the Bureau of Guidance offers this summary of James Farrell's study. An attempt has been made to highlight areas of consensus and areas of disagreement in the literature and on the part of various school disciplines regarding the counselor's role. We hope this summary will serve as a catalyst for further discussion, research, and review of all personnel concerned with the role of the counselor.

This report has been prepared by Alice A. Healy, Associate in Education Guidance, under the supervision of Ivan H. Miller, Supervisor, Bureau of Guidance.

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In 1966 a study was conducted by James Farrell of State University of New York, Brockport, under the sponsorship of the Bureau of Guidance, to analyze the role of the elementary school guidance counselor. The purpose was to explore the perceptions of counselors, teachers, and principals in selected elementary schools regarding their expectations of the role of the elementary school counselor. The study further sought to discover areas and degrees of consensus regarding the counselor's role among the three disciplines surveyed and to determine reasons (as perceived by the surveyed subjects) for points of agreement and points of disagreement.

## PROCEDURES

Thirty-five schools throughout New York State were involved in the research project. Each school had an elementary school counselor, and was involved in an elementary school guidance pilot project. The counselor, principal, and two teachers (randomly selected) from each school were asked to respond to a Role Expectation Questionnaire, especially developed for this study.

The Role Expectation Questionnaire was a listing of 63 items selected from the professional literature, and from discussions with concerned personnel. These items depicted certain functions identified with the role of the counselor in the elementary school (e.g., Item #8-Make home visits, Item #9-Identify emotionally disturbed students). In all, 33 counselors, 33 principals, and 66 teachers responded to this measuring instrument.

In addition, individual interviews were scheduled with the counselor, principal, and a teacher in 10 of the participating schools. The interview was to check information regarding the subject's reasons for his particular responses to the items in the questionnaire. A Background Information Form was also given to each of the respondents and an attempt was made to tabulate certain characteristics of the surveyed group.

## FINDINGS

Returned responses from the Role Expectation Questionnaire were computerized to determine areas and degrees of agreement and disagreement.

### Areas of Agreement

The results indicated that the following items received a high degree of consensus from each of the three groups surveyed.

Counselors should:

a. Help teachers cope with problem children.
b. Counsel individual students with personal problems.
c. Confer with individual students not achieving well.
d. Help individual teachers appraise students with problems.
e. Evaluate progress of groups having special guidance activities.
f. Coordinate school referrals to outside agencies.

g. Screen pupils for referrals to community agencies.
h. Counsel with parents having children with social and emotional problems.
i. Consult with teachers on pupil-teacher interaction.
j. Help teachers identify pupils who need special help.
k. Write anecdotal records on children.
l. Meet parents in individual conferences.
m. Conduct case conferences with teachers.

Counselors should not:

a. Assist with routine school administrative details.
b. Give tutorial assistance to children having obvious academic or learning difficulties.

Competency in counseling, according to this study, was viewed as the counselor's main area of contribution in the elementary school. The groups appeared to agree that the counselor was not to teach, or be considered a teacher of mental health units.

Areas of disagreement

Disagreement among the three disciplines occurred on various points, among which were:

a. Who should coordinate the pupil personnel services in the school? Some members of each discipline thought that this activity belonged in their specific areas, while others thought the principal should assume this role.

b. Who should administer group and individual tests? Counselors indicated that they should not administer any tests. They thought individual testing was a service to be rendered by the school psychologist and group testing was an inefficient use of counselor time. Teachers believed that counselors should administer both group and individual tests, while principals indicated that counselors should administer group intelligence tests, but not individual tests.

c. Should counselors serve as consultants to teachers on matters concerning curriculum, grouping, and prevention of problems? Counselors viewed these areas as a definite part of their function, while teachers appeared to feel that curriculum was their field, and that counselors had little knowledge in this area. Both principals and teachers seemed to indicate that counselor functions were more appropriate to remediation and correction than to positive development and prevention.

Disagreement among the groups centered around certain general factors. The lack of a role precedent and the large gaps in understanding of the role of the elementary school counselor were most frequently mentioned by members of all three groups as the reasons behind their differing expectations. Counselors and principals saw some disagreement

stemming from teachers who regarded their classrooms as their "castles." They saw teachers as hesitant and independent. A threat to the status quo was also cited by counselors and principals as an additional factor in role disagreement. Teachers' perceived reasons for role disagreement were mainly the same as those of counselors and principals. Teachers, however, cited the counselor's lack of skill in interpersonal relations as a factor contributing to role disagreement.

It was further noted that different schools held different expectations as to the functions of the elementary school counselor. These functions were directed at meeting the particular needs of the school rather than following a set pattern stemming from the title "guidance counselor."

An overall view of the study indicated that counselors and principals appeared to be more in agreement concerning counselor functions than counselors and teachers or principals and teachers. It was hypothesized that this fact was due to the greater interaction and communication between counselors and principals than between counselors and teachers. While counselors communicate with many teachers in one school, they relate to only one principal.

## THE LITERATURE

The findings of this study are in basic agreement with the research of Raines (1964) who found lack of agreement among counselors, principals, and other special service personnel regarding the role of the elementary school counselor. Kaback (1963) also found conflicts between the expectations of pupils and teachers regarding the counselor's role.

Moreau (1966) in a study conducted among teachers, principals, supervisors, and other unspecified elementary school personnel found that principals did the major share of individual counseling--this mainly in schools where there were no elementary counselors. Most other researchers found agreement, among the various disciplines concerned, on the point that when present in a school, the elementary guidance counselor's main function was to counsel children in personal-social, educational, and vocational areas. Consultation on curriculum matters, certain areas of social work, and areas of testing were among those functions where the opinions of the disciplines differed. These differences were also noted in the present study.

## IMPLICATIONS

Several implications of this study for personnel in the field are:

### Implications of the Study for Elementary School Principals

1. The realization that conflicting opinions do exist regarding the functions of the elementary school counselor will indicate the importance of discussion and clarification of the counselor's role at the inception of the program in each school. The

principal should be aware of the specific needs to be met through a guidance program, and the specific talents available through the counselor to meet those needs. It has been found helpful to schedule orientation conferences where the counselor is introduced to the staff and his role and functions clearly defined. A formal listing of the goals and objectives of the guidance program, drawn up by a committee involving the counselor, principal, and members of the teaching staff, has also been found most beneficial in establishing rapport among the various disciplines and in helping to clarify the differing roles in the guidance program. Periodic reviews and evaluations with counselors and staff regarding program goals help all concerned to keep abreast of current needs.

2. An awareness of the finding in this study, supported by Muro's study (1965), that elementary school principals and teachers find the remedial-corrective approach more acceptable to the functioning of the guidance counselor, will indicate to the principal that counselors may experience difficulty using a developmental-preventive approach. Since the latter tends to produce better long-range results, the principal may wish to examine his individual guidance program and determine which approach he consciously prefers and selects, rather than sub-consciously allows and expects.

3. The knowledge that real conflict exists among the three disciplines surveyed regarding certain functions, especially with respect to the area of testing, points to the need for a reexamination of that area to best utilize the skills and abilities of the entire staff. An explanation of the counselor's role, from this reexamination, should then be given to all concerned personnel.

4. The Role Expectation Questionnaire taken alone may be of assistance in the formation and/or evaluation of guidance programs. It may also be adapted for individual use to meet specific needs.

Implications of this Study for Elementary School Counselors

1. This study indicates that elementary school counselors may anticipate conflicting expectations of their functions from other school personnel. Aware of this finding, the counselor should be prepared professionally and personally to recognize those factors creating the conflicts, and be concerned with developing experiences which would help to promote greater role clarity. A guidance committee should be formed composed of teacher representatives, the principal, and the counselor. This committee would discuss, develop, and clarify: goals and objectives of the guidance program, the role of the counselor, and techniques and procedures of guidance relevant to the elementary school. This procedure has been most effective in helping to establish a firm foundation for programs of

elementary school guidance. Orientation programs for teachers, parents, and children to acquaint them with the counselor's role are also of major importance.

2. Awareness of specific functions about which there is little or no conflict can help new counselors select beginning activities so that a strong program nucleus might be established from the outset. Once the counselor has established his position and indicated certain strengths and abilities in these "no-conflict" functions, he may then move more securely to include his additional activities about which there might be differing opinions.

3. Review of the Role Expectation Instrument may serve to remind some counselors of certain functions applicable to their discipline and introduce new activities to others.

4. Counselors may wish to discuss this Study and/or the Role Expectation Questionnaire at workshops or faculty meetings. Methods of solution are more easily found through open discussion and review of these conflicts.

5. Teachers indicated that the counselor's lack of skill in the area of interpersonal relations was a major cause of role disagreement. The implications here are clear for action to bring about a change of concept in this area. Perhaps thought might be given to workshops in sensitivity training, or T-groups might be formed for counselors in a district, and/or counselors and faculty members within a given school.

Implications of the Study for Elementary School Teachers

1. This study indicates that teachers in other schools are also experiencing difficulties in understanding and accepting the role of the elementary counselor. A realization of this fact, and a knowledge of some of the perceived reasons should help alleviate teachers' anxieties regarding this new position. It may also be assumed that if teachers feel their own authority threatened, or their areas of specialty encroached upon, they tend to under-utilize those services established to assist them in the education of the children. Awareness of the feelings and conflicting opinions of contemporaries regarding the matter of accepting guidance personnel should lead to increased efforts toward understanding and acceptance on the part of the teachers.

Implications of this Study for Counselor-Educators

1. Findings from this study and those noted in related research indicate that the act of "counseling" is seen by incumbents and related disciplines as the most important function of the elementary school counselor. Yet research by Nitzsche and Hill (1964) indicated that in the preparation of counselors on

the elementary level, stress was placed on courses in child development, child study, and appraisal, with a dearth of courses on counseling theories and practicums in counseling. As a result, a followup study be Greene, Hill, and Nitzsche (1968) indicated that counselors of the primary grades spent most of their time in consultative work with teachers and parents. This, Greene felt, may be partly due to the lack of skill in counseling very young children. Only 43 percent of the elementary school counselors in his sample had completed any type of counseling practicum.

2. Adequate preparation for the counseling role is of vital importance in establishing the role precedent earnestly sought by all involved personnel regarding the concept of the elementary school guidance counselor.

The study has implications for all disciplines surveyed and for counselor-educators concerned with the preparation of elementary school counselors. Some of these implications have been noted here. It is hoped that this study will be of assistance to all school personnel in bringing about a smoother functioning guidance program on the elementary school level.

Copies of the Role Expectation Questionnaire may be obtained from the Bureau of Guidance, State Education Department, Albany, New York 12224.

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